

**Resurrection: Four Ways to Faith**

John 20

Turn to John 20. Here's a line from Paul. *God appointed a man. He gave proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.* That's in Acts 17, Paul's sermon to the philosophers in Athens. *God appointed a man. He gave proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.*

God showed us who to trust and who to obey by raising him from the dead. God showed us who we must not reject, by raising him back to life after people rejected and killed him. God showed us his choice by raising his choice, Jesus of Nazareth, from the dead.

There were other signs along the way, of course, that Jesus was God's appointed man, the Christ, the Son of God. But the New Testament itself considers the resurrection to be the towering evidence that Jesus was God's choice, evidence that Jesus was all he said he was. *God appointed a man. He gave proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.*

Why am I a Christian and not a Buddhist or a Muslim? Because Jesus said he was the one and only way? Others have made big claims for themselves. But God raised Jesus from the dead, and only Jesus, and that means what he said was true.

People may not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Right after Paul said, *God gave proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead*, some of that audience in Athens began to sneer at Paul, to mock him. That was true from the start, that's their business.

People out there have a right to ask me this: Why do I think following Christ is the right way to God and their way is not the right way? They need to know why I think that. The New Testament teaches that if I have to answer in one sentence, it is that Jesus was raised from death. And even those who do NOT believe Jesus rose from the dead still have a right to know why I follow Christ.

The actual resurrection stories, though, are kind of humble. What I want is Jesus to blast away the stone from the inside and come striding out of the tomb on Sunday morning with a big crowd there ready and watching. We read nothing like that. No one saw him come out.

An angel rolled the stone away, and Matthew tells us that guards saw that. The body was already gone by then, because the guards make up a story about the disciples stealing the body. No one actually saw him come out. Jesus was raised and gone before the stone was moved. And some of the first ones to see him were confused, were not sure, and so on.

But these are their stories, now our stories, told to us in the hope that we will also have faith in this Jesus. These stories had been told and re-told many times before John wrote them down. They just told the stories they had, humble or not, because those stories are how they actually came know that Jesus rose.

These stories were always told so that those hearing would also believe. And we read these stories and re-tell them today for the very same reason, so that we would believe in this Jesus, and if we already believe, to renew that faith.

### **1 The Beloved Disciple Sees and Believes (20:1–10)**

*John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”*

“**WE** don’t know where they put him.” In the other Gospels there are more women than one, and John only mentions Mary, but the “we” tells us that there are others with Mary. All Mary saw was that the stone was moved. She did not think to look in. From what she saw, she assumed the body had been moved.

*<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was ‘rolled up in a place by itself, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.*

Twice we read about the burial clothes. The Beloved Disciple looked at the strips of linen lying there, and then Simon Peter came and saw the strips of linen lying there, and the cloth that had been around Jesus’ head carefully placed on its own.

When Jesus raised Lazarus, Lazarus walked out with the burial clothes still on, his hands and his feet wrapped, and others had to unwrap him. Lazarus could move, but could not free himself.

We don’t know what went on in the Beloved Disciple’s mind, but it has to be something like this: the strips of linen mean that they’re at the right tomb. We don’t know how the strips are lying. If someone unwrapped the linen strips and left them behind and took just the body, there would be a big pile of linen strips.

But if they were wrapped tight around a person and Jesus went through them, so that they were still nice and neat just no body in them, well, that is very hard to explain without a miracle of some sort. John’s Gospel is the only one that mentions that Jesus came into a room with the doors locked. In any case, he believed. He is the only one to come to faith in the resurrection without actually meeting Jesus.

In that way he’s a model for us. He did not see Jesus, but he had evidence. We don’t see but have evidence. Proof? No, he did not have proof, as we see scientific proof. But he had real evidence, and he believed.

All Four Gospels have empty tomb stories. These are essential to our hope. Jesus did not get a new body. If he had, his old body would still be in the tomb. But the tomb was empty. His old body was raised and transformed into a spiritual body, but it still had crucifixion scars.

## 2 Mary Sees and Believes (20:11–18)

<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb  
<sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. <sup>13</sup> They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"  
 "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." <sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.  
<sup>15</sup> He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"  
 Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

In all the Gospel stories, Easter Sunday morning began with a search for the missing body. It did not begin with someone seeing Jesus, it began with a search. The stone is rolled away, and it's clear the body is not there. Where is the body of Jesus?

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mary was first to the grave, and first to see Jesus. Jesus gave her a message for the rest, but the first appearance was to Mary. "I have seen the Lord!" The happiest words possible on that day.

The Beloved Disciple quickly came to believe that Jesus had risen, but Mary was slow, as Thomas was slow in the fourth scene. Mary did *not* notice the grave clothes, it seems she did *not* recognize that the two angels in the tomb were angels, the first time she saw Jesus she did *not* recognize him, and the first time he spoke she still did *not* recognize him.

But she eventually did see and hear and recognize. Even someone slow to recognize Jesus became entirely convinced that Jesus had risen. And she did as Jesus said, she went to the disciples and passed on his message.

*Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'* Imagine Jesus sending this message to us here this morning. "Go to my brothers and sisters in Kleefeld and tell them, 'I have gone to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Where is he now, today? With his Father, also our Father, his God, also our God. Jesus wants his people to pass this on, he wants this message passed on here this morning.

### 3 The Disciples See and Believe (20:19–23)

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

*On the first day of the week when the disciples were together, Jesus showed up! Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you.”*

*Peace be with you* is not just for their benefit, my brothers and sisters, but also for us.

Jesus showed them his hands and his side. Even though Jesus apparently could float through grave clothes and the rock that closed the tomb, and could appear in a room with locked doors, the signs of crucifixion were still on his hands, and where the soldier stabbed his side.

What those wounds looked like we do not know, but it made clear to the disciples that this Jesus was the same one that was crucified and died the day before yesterday. But now he was *alive*, and they were so relieved and delighted; it was a very happy group.

*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

There are a few things in here that I do not understand, but the basic truth is that we, his brothers and sisters, are now to be Jesus in the world. He’s going back to the Father, but before he left he sent us. He gives us three things in these words.

One, he sends us as he was sent: as the Father sent the Son into the world to speak for the Father, so the Son sends us into the world to speak for the Son.

Two, he gives us the Holy Spirit, who teaches us, helps us, who himself witnesses to the world.

And three, we have authority in the world. That’s the main point about our forgiving or not forgiving. We have the right to speak and act on behalf of Jesus. It must mean something like: “People will respond to your message and your lives, as they did to mine, and by their response to you their sins will be forgiven them or not forgiven, as with their response to me.”

We are sent to speak for Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, and we have the right to speak and act on behalf of Jesus. We are now to be Jesus in the world.

#### 4 Thomas Sees and Believes (20:24–28)

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

A week later they were in the house again. That means it was the first day of the week, Sunday. The Lord rose on a Sunday, and the next Sunday again he showed up among the disciples. John’s Gospel is making a point about the first day of the week, and about the presence of Jesus.

It is not that disciples don’t gather on other days, or that Jesus is not present on other days. Nevertheless this Scripture quietly but intentionally puts three things together: (i) the risen Jesus is present (ii) the disciples gather (iii) on the first day of the week.

The book of Revelation, written by the same John, says in 1:10, “*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day . . .*” and the rest of Revelation is what John saw in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.

For Thomas, seeing Jesus will not be enough. He will not trust his eyes. He thinks the others are just having visions, hallucinations. Thomas will have to see *and touch*. Then he will believe. He needs to see, and put his finger where the nails were, and put his hand where the spear was.

So when Jesus appeared, he offered Thomas the very thing Thomas had asked for: he offered sight and touch. *Put your finger here, and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.*

And then Jesus scolded Thomas. Imagine Jesus thinking this: “Thomas, if sight is not enough for you, if you have to see and touch before you believe, how will anyone believe in me who can neither see nor touch?”

*Stop doubting and believe.* There is honest doubt and there is willful doubt. Honest doubt comes when a person would like to believe but just cannot get there. It is distressing, and happens at times to mature believers. It is unpleasant, but not condemned.

Thomas had crossed the line from honest doubt to wilful doubt. He had chosen not to be convinced. He folded his arms and leaned back and said, “I’m not convinced he’s alive; prove it!” For him, Jesus proved it. But Jesus knew that very few people would have that luxury.

Jesus proved it to Thomas for our sake, so we will know there was one like this also, and he also believed.

But then Thomas went from last place to first place. Thomas did not just believe, he worshipped: *My Lord and my God*. Thomas the very first person to call Jesus “God.” Perhaps the only one to say this to Jesus’ face.

For a devout Jew, as Thomas was, to look at a person and call the person “God” is almost inconceivable. But he did it, and Jesus accepted it, and so apparently did the rest of the disciples. *My Lord and my God*. That is the ultimate faith response to the risen Jesus.

So we have four stories. The Beloved Disciple believed without actually seeing Jesus. We are more or less put in that spot. Mary was distressed, not a doubter but distressed, and slow to pick up on the signs that Jesus was alive and beside her. But eventually she did recognize and believe.

The group of disciples the first Sunday was frightened and hidden, but they saw Jesus and believed and were overjoyed. Thomas was a professional doubter, he thought the resurrection was a hoax, a group hallucination. But he also came to faith, and worshipped Jesus.

I want to end with the different words of Jesus to us. First: *Peace to you*. Twice he said that on the first Sunday, and again on the second Sunday. First words out of his mouth: *peace to you*. My peace to you, gathering in Kleefeld on the first day of the week.

*Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*

*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*

*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.* Jesus said that on the second Sunday meeting, and it was not for them, because they were seeing; it is for us. *Peace be with you. Blessed are you because you have not seen and yet have believed. Amen.*

PRAYER: Father, we so glad you raised your Son Jesus from the dead. We praise you for raising him. We praise you that your Spirit woke up faith in us. You opened the eyes of our hearts to see your light. Please send him back to us as soon as possible! Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep—may that God of peace equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.